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Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

House of Representatives

HONORING WOMEN OF THE YEAR
HONORABLE JOHN GARAMENDI
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Pat Ash

*City Councilwoman and preservationist
Williams – Colusa County*

Pat Ash, the current mayor of Williams, has served as a Williams City Council Member for many years. She is the founding and most active member of Citizens for a Better Williams, known locally as CBW.

Through her membership on the city council and in CBW, Pat has played a crucial role in beautifying vacant areas, including a parcel that was annexed into the town square park. An outstanding example of Pat's leadership and generous spirit is her preservation of the aging Masonic Hall in town. Pat recently purchased it herself, thus maintaining its historic value to the city and county.

Under Pat's sustaining leadership CBW recently arranged for a mural to be painted on the Masonic Hall, adding local interest and a festive atmosphere to this popular park. On June 7th, the mayor hosted a mural dedication ceremony that featured Governor Jerry Brown and relatives of W.H. Williams, founder of the town. Through her creativity and tenacity, Pat has been instrumental in organizing Williams' Summer Concerts in the Park series featuring local musicians. The venue offers the community a place to mingle and for nonprofit groups to hold fundraisers. In further testimony to Pat's enduring appreciation for her city, she has written a book illustrating the influence of Western Europeans settling in Williams. Pat's fellow citizens appreciate her efforts to preserve and showcase the city's history.

Nominated by Sarvan Singh and Sharon Singh



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Marci Coglianese

Municipal law attorney, former city official, land use advocate

Rio Vista – Solano County

Marci Coglianese, past mayor and council member for the City of Rio Vista, has practiced municipal and environmental law for more than 25 years. Her achievements in furthering good land use planning, and environmental and risk management practices for the Delta are extraordinary. Marci represented the League of California Cities on the State Floodplain Management Task Force and on the public advisory committee to update the California Water Plan. She has been instrumental in protecting Solano County farmland and served as co-chair of the Delta Levees and Habitat Subcommittee of the Bay Delta Public Advisory Committee. She is an active member of the Rio Vista Army Base Steering Committee.

Marci has always been a vocal and staunch advocate for fairness and for racial and gender equality in local government. After assuming office she was notable for her openness in listening and responding to the needs of her constituents of every political stripe and economic status. A person of the highest integrity and forthrightness, Marci sets an exemplary standard for all in political office, from the smallest village to the national capitol. Despite serious illness and family trauma, she has maintained a manner of openness, grace, and humor toward even her most bitter opponents. Marci Coglianese is greatly loved and admired by all who know her.

Nominated by Albert Medvitz and Debbie Elliot



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Deborah Eernisse

Fitness instructor, mentor, and volunteer
Davis – Yolo County

Deborah's outstanding trait is her ability to build community with diverse groups of all ages, particularly around fitness and health. In Davis she has built a supportive community of older adults who remain active and engaged in their own health and happiness. Her "Fit for Life" program at the Davis Senior Center has reduced injuries, falls, and the need for hospitalization or skilled nursing care.

Deborah graduated from UC Davis with a minor in Adult Development and Aging. She had planned to be an at-home mom, but faced with serious medical problems in her immediate family she had the foresight and strength to persevere and graduate from the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program at Sacramento City College. Since then she has earned a number of other certifications.

Participants in Deborah's fitness classes have been able to improve their muscle tone, balance, coordination and strength in such a way that many age-related declines are slowed or prevented. Class members who have had strokes, joint replacement, fractures and similar problems are able to follow through with their long-term rehabilitation. Those with chronic conditions such as diabetes or neuropathy are able to optimize their independence and quality of life. Beyond strength, friendships are created and social support flourishes. Her classes fill up quickly and have a waiting list. Deborah also conducts a popular free yoga class for the Davis High School football team, and she has served on the board of the Davis Food Co-op. Recently she completed 30 hours of training to become part of the Davis Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Deborah is now part of a pool of volunteers ready to assist in large-scale emergencies.

Nominated by Marcia Kreith, Louise Bettner, Hannah Stein, Douglas McColm, Logan Kittle, and Julie Cross



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Gloria Estrada

*Veteran advocate and peace activist
Williams - Colusa County*

Gloria Estrada works tirelessly for the interests of Colusa County families, donating much of her time to organizations that benefit the community's veterans and the families of fallen soldiers. On August 11, 2011, not long after recovering from a head-on crash Gloria's son, Pfc. Rueben "Boy" Lopez, was killed in action by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. Since then Gloria has dedicated herself to helping families in need and advocating for peace. She celebrates her son's service and sacrifice by paying it forward.

One way she has done this is by arranging for the placement of Peace Poles in each community in Colusa County. The Peace Pole serves as a symbol to remind community members that they are the peace builders. On August 11, 2014, Gloria and her family organized a ceremony on the grounds of the state capitol in Sacramento. Veterans of Colusa County traveled to the state capitol for the ceremony in which 193 full-size flags of the world were carried. A Peace Pole featuring the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in 12 different languages was presented to the People of California.

Each year on the anniversary of her son's death, Gloria chooses an agency, school, or group where she hosts a celebration urging those present to celebrate life and to please pay good works forward. Gloria is a tireless community volunteer and an exceptionally loving and giving woman. Whenever someone is in need, Gloria is quick to search on their behalf. If someone needs company, Gloria is at their side with reassuring words. Those who know her well agree that each of us is a better person because we have Gloria in our life.

Nominated by Barbara Pennebaker and Dolores Gomez



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Mary Grimmer

*School and community volunteer extraordinaire
Arbuckle - Colusa County*

Mary Grimmer is an amazing woman, full of energy and passion, and extremely giving of her time and resources. For the past five years, Mary has volunteered at least 12 hours per week in the school library, helping students locate books, cataloging new books, and reminding students to return overdue ones. Each year she donates a generous number of titles to the library collection.

Meanwhile, the school office can count on Mary to help with school pictures in the fall and spring of each year. Through the Parent Club, she takes the lead on ordering all of the school tee-shirts and sweatshirts that students purchase. You also will see Mary Grimmer at all kinds of events, camera around her neck, taking thousands of pictures that she shares with the students.

Mary is an active 4-H leader and a member of the Arbuckle Little League where she is responsible for many aspects of the organization, including scheduling of games. She is a part-time employee of the Arbuckle Parks & Recreation Department, giving more time than she could ever be compensated for. And, when someone in the community is ill or has just had a baby, Mary graciously delivers a home-cooked meal as a show of support for them.

Programs for children just don't happen. They take the dedicated people who care about kids to devote their time, energy and often their own financial resources. Mary provides initiative and the physical labor to fill the gaps. She is a beacon calling others to volunteer their time to change the lives of children.

Nominated by Kay Spurgeon and Carol Geyer



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Samina Masood

*Working to end poverty, homelessness, and abuse of women
Fairfield - Solano County*

Since 2012 Samina Masood has partnered with the City of Fairfield to seize the twin horns of homelessness and domestic abuse in order to demonstrate that renewal is possible for homeless, abused, and neglected women and their children. Were it not for her direct intervention and program services, hundreds of women and children would go without hope, a place to live, or resurrected lives. Each year her organization, Heather House, takes in hundreds of needy and vulnerable women, then shelters and supports them. Samina resides on campus with them to run the seven-day-a week program. Empowered by their experience in a 90-day work program, they are able to leave the shelter with a job, housing, and the skills to achieve economic independence. Samina's passion and dedication are quite infectious, engaging many city leaders to join hands and work together on behalf of these at-risk local women and their children. She has served as a commissioner on the Mayor's Commission on Crime to help prevent and reduce crime in the city.

Masood herself is a role model. She came to the United States as an immigrant from the third world country of Pakistan. She is a writer and published columnist with her columns appearing in the Tracy Press nationally and in the US State Department Gazette. Samina has two master degrees—an MA in Communications and an MS in Clinical Psychology. In the 80s and 90s she worked for the World Health Organization, the US Department of State, and US-AID as an advocate for women and children. An abuse survivor herself, Samina talks openly about her childhood growing up in a county where women and children are deprived of rights. She often speaks of how she saved her own soul by fighting for other women who had no voice. She is writing a memoir.

Nominated by Richard Rivera, Interfaith Council of Solano County, Dawn LeBar



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Dr. Frances Nelson

Librarian, educator, literacy advocate

Fairfield - Solano County

Frances Nelson has brought outstanding gifts to the educational community of Solano County. She is a preeminent librarian whose commitment to diversity and whose advocacy for the teaching of U.S. history and government have enriched the lives of many students and adults. Frances has a myriad of community and educational experiences over more than 15 years in Vacaville's secondary classrooms and, after her retirement, as adjunct librarian with 20 years of service at Solano Community College. She is the only African-American librarian that Solano Community College has had in its seventy-year history.

Dr. Nelson has pioneered information access techniques with individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Through the California School Library Association Dr. Nelson participated on a committee that developed "Standards for Information Literacy: Grades k-12." This endeavor prompted her to develop a library skill workbook and a video tape presentation on school site curriculum for a Vallejo school library. Frances travels regularly to Oakland to select as many as 75 books that she then donates to the Solano Juvenile facility. She also donates hair care products to African-American girls there when these are requested. Dr. Nelson is a newly appointed Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Commissioner for Solano County, is active in the Delta Kappa Gamma Society Beta Psi Chapter, and has served in leadership roles at her church. Dr. Frances Gholson Nelson has elevated the whole community—not just with the time she has spent in community service but in the quality of her service that counts for so much more.

Nominated by Delores Da'Venport, Jowell Laguerre, Yvonne Robbins, and Theardis Nelson



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Gloria Partida

*Advocate for restorative justice and anti-bullying activist
Davis - Yolo County*

When her son was savagely attacked near downtown Davis the night of March 10, 2013 in what was deemed to be an anti-gay hate crime, Gloria Partida responded with composure and grace. She not only cared for her son Mikey's needs, physical and emotional, she led the community in a candlelight vigil coordinated by concerned community members. Mikey spent months in rehabilitation and many more in at-home care by family members relearning the tasks of daily life and receiving counseling for PTSD. Gloria faced the tragedy and its aftermath courageously and with compassion. In an October 6, 2013 editorial, "Innocence Lost: Now where are my virtues?" she set a powerful example, showing our community how to push back against hate crimes and bullying behaviors of all kinds:

Having survived this magnitude of violence, my son and family became magnets for people who had suffered similar experiences and wanted to share their stories. Sadly, there were many. This produced for me, ever the optimist, an internal civil war. How could people who started out sweet and promising turn into vessels of evil?...What became evident to me...was that I needed to be responsible for more than my own children. And not just the smart, easy-to-get along with ones....the marginalized ones."

Gloria attended a church meeting on the topic "Standing Up to Hate," and in that meeting the Davis Phoenix Coalition was born. Gloria worked ceaselessly on the group's projects, including a March 2014 anti-bullying workshop; a screening and discussion of "The Laramie Project" and other awareness-raising events; fund-raising and attending the "Not in Our Town" national gathering in Montana; designing a tee shirt and bumper sticker; writing an anti-bullying brochure ... always turning a devastating personal event into an opportunity for community growth.

Nominated by Alexandra Lee-Jobe, Karen Ruan, Beth Tausczik, and Ellen Pontac



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Linda Plummer

Healthcare advocate, arts supporter, community volunteer
Marysville - Yuba County

Linda Plummer is known as a distinguished advocate for health care and for the arts, twin passions that merged when she created Rideout Healthy Kids. RHK is a musical theater program teaching healthy eating and exercise habits. Still in its first year, the program created seven jobs-- four actors, a director and two sound technicians--and reached more than 4,000 school children in its first season.

As part of her job as marketing manager for Rideout Health, Linda helps to get the word out about the newly expanded Rideout Regional Medical Center, the largest construction project in recent memory in Marysville and its neighboring communities. Linda is a dedicated steward of the project. As 30 ironworkers, eight carpenters, six deck builders, two rebar workers and 15 other laborers and inspectors worked on the structure last year, Linda observed the sudden transformation following years of planning. "It's like Christmas," she said.

The Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce has recognized Linda for her deep community involvement. She founded the Way, Way, Way Off Broadway event to give performance opportunities to high school actors. She is a board member of the Sutter Performing Arts Association and Yuba-Sutter Arts. A past president of the Rotary Club of Yuba City, she has been involved with Friends of Yuba City Parks and Recreation; the Casa de Esperanza shelter for victims of domestic violence; Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts; and the Galena Street East performance group to encourage young artists. She was a judge for the Sacramento Regional Theater Alliance. When asked how she manages her busy schedule, she admitted: "What schedule?" For Linda, "Volunteering is addictive. Whatever form it may take, volunteerism has an incurable impact on people-- you see it change lives."

Nominated by Dan Cucchi and Jeannie Klever



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Lonetta Riley

Educator and school district trustee
Yuba - Sutter County

Lonetta Riley has served on the Yuba City Unified School District board for 16 years as District 3's representative and for the past two years as board president. Says a friend, "you can count on Lonetta's support for the students and she stands up for teachers and the job that they try to do in these times of diminished funding." Lonetta Riley is the only African-American woman to ever have been elected to office in Sutter County. "When asked what it was like to be the first, she always responds that "it doesn't really matter unless I work to make sure there is a second, third and fourth."

Lonetta began her advocacy for education in 1970 while a graduate student at the University of Nebraska where she led demonstrations to address the poor graduation rates of black athletes. As a member of the Douglas County (Nebraska) Citizens Committee, she was instrumental in bringing attention to local civil rights violations. More recently as a Juvenile Justice Commissioner for Sutter County, she has worked to raise awareness and organize efforts to address the difficult issues facing delinquent youth. She is passionate in believing that mentoring during probation is an opportunity to help individuals get their lives back on track.

A criminal justice professor in the Los Rios Community College District, Lonetta is the Training Coordinator for the Regional Public Safety Training Center of American River College and guides the training of law enforcement personnel. She is a member of the Bethel AME Church, the National Urban League, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Bridges 2 Housing and other community organizations. Lonetta believes that "if you don't use your voice for change, your silence says the status quo is okay." She exemplifies the adage to be the change you would like to see in the world.

Nominated by Barbara Babbitt, Ken Riley, and Jeannie Klever



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Denise Rushing

*County Supervisor and economic strategist
Upper Lake – Lake County*

Denise Rushing is best known for her work as a business growth strategist. With a background in energy technology and digital marketing, Denise helps change-makers innovate, create and enter new markets consistent with their values. She has generated grassroots momentum to find renewable and regenerative solutions to environmental problems. In 2006, after living in Lake County for just 18 months, Denise was elected to the Board of Supervisors in one of the most transformative elections in Lake County history as her platform of justice and environmental stewardship resonated with voters.

Lake County's economic evolution over 7 ½ years is a testament to Denise's leadership and evidenced by California's Green Summit Environmental Leadership Award two years in a row. One project is the largest public solar installation in the western United States; the other, "appropriate tech" park structures constructed with volunteer labor and all local and natural materials. Denise was instrumental in transforming a blighted trailer park into an eco-park, and a leading advocate in bringing the county's first four-year educational institution to Lucerne. She has been passionate about finding healthy solutions for improving water quality in Clear Lake and has worked collaboratively on local boards and committees, including one that brought traditional agriculture and the organic community together in a "Food Roundtable." Denise was elected in a resounding fashion and, true to her promises, has effected lasting, sustainable change in Lake County and the people who live here.

Nominated by the Joy Swetnam group and Carol Cole-Lewis



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Michelle Scully

*Educator, agriculture and economic development advocate
Lake County*

Michelle has a twenty-year history of service to Lake County, particularly in the areas of education, agriculture, and economic development. When Michelle and her husband relocated to Lake County as he went to work in the family's pear packing and farming businesses, she quickly immersed herself in community activities. She was appointed to an advisory board tasked with researching the divisive issue of genetically modified crops. She also served on the steering committee that developed Lake County AgVenture, a program to educate community leaders on the importance of agriculture to Lake County. To address the issue of hunger, Michelle organized a very successful Bountiful Gift Box fundraiser for the county's Hunger Task Force. She brings creativity and solid business ideas to the table of the Regional Economic Development Committee with a style that keeps community members excited and engaged in realizing opportunities. She was a member of the Advisory Council appointed to be a driving force behind the opening of Marymount California University's Lakeside Campus and now serves as the campus's inaugural executive director.

Michelle has weathered storms, professional and personal, with infinite grace and a smile on her face. When she fell and broke her back riding her horse on their ranch, Michelle dragged herself, using only her arms, a quarter mile home where she laid on the floor until her husband arrived and insisted on taking her to the ER. Once home from surgery she missed just three lectures of teaching her biology class at Mendocino College, where she is still an instructor. Michelle personifies grit—she is able to work hard, overcome adversity, and bring long-term passions and community goals to fruition.

Nominated by: Matt Perry, Denise Rushing, and Rebecca Southwick



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Nicole Montna Van Vleck

*Rice grower and industry leader
Sutter and Sacramento Counties*

Nicole Montna Van Vleck is the managing partner of family owned and operated Montna Farms in Yuba City, a major grower of Japanese short grain specialty rice. Nicole is actively involved in all aspects of the operations from growing to drying and milling and her involvement with California agriculture is long-standing. She is a third generation Sutter County rice farmer who has been a leader in numerous associations as an advocate for the state's farmers.

For more than a decade she has served on the California Rice Commission where she currently sits on the Board of Directors and on numerous committees. She is a member of the California Rice Industry Association Board and in 2011 joined the Board of Directors for American Commodity Company. From February of 2011 to July 2013, Nicole served as co-chair for the USA Rice Federation Rice Quality Task Force and remains active. She also is active in the USA Rice Producers Group.

In the area of water, Nicole has leadership roles in the Northern California Water Association. She is Vice President of the Sutter Bypass Butte Slough Water Users Association, having been president for more than a decade. She is Treasurer of Garden Highway Mutual Water District. Outside of agriculture, Nicole is a member of the Board of Directors for River Valley Community Bank. Nicole is a graduate of the California Agricultural Leadership Program, and of the USA Rice Leadership Program. Early in her career she worked as a legislative analyst for the law firm of Morrison & Foerster before returning to the family farm in 1994. As Vice Chair of the California State Fair Agricultural Advisory Board, Nicole advocates for agricultural education programs for youth. She raised money for State Fair Scholarships and school tours of the State Fair Farm. Nicole is a respected leader and champion for women in agriculture statewide and for economic development in Sutter County.

Nominated by Barbara LeVake